



Guide to Accreditation

All information is excerpted from the book "If You Want to Study in the United States: Short-Term Study, English Language Programs, Distance Education, and Accreditation."
To download the entire book for free, in English or in French, please visit www.EducationUSA.state.gov.

- Accreditation is the system of recognition and quality assurance for institutions and programs in the United States.
- Accreditation is a voluntary process in the United States and, unlike in many countries, is not carried out by a central governing body such as the U.S. Department of Education. Licensing of higher education institutions by state departments of education is *not* the same as accreditation.
- Recognition of a U.S. degree in the United States and in other countries is often determined by the accreditation status of the institution or program of study. International students should check with their home country ministry of education, council of higher education, or other regulatory body, regarding any restrictions on recognition of U.S. degrees.
- The process of accreditation requires institutions to have an appropriate mission; to control the resources to achieve that mission; to be meeting that mission effectively; and to give evidence that it will continue to meet its mission for the foreseeable future. Accrediting bodies also aim to foster improvement in their member institutions.
- Accrediting bodies' requirements vary, but all require that institutions or programs carry out a detailed self-study and submit a report on that study for approval by the accrediting body. The process of accreditation is ongoing and includes periodic reports and inspections to ensure standards are maintained.
- Accreditation can be institutional, covering the whole institution, or programmatic (sometimes called professional or specialized), covering a program or department within an institution. A number of accrediting bodies carry out each type of accreditation.
- Institutional accrediting bodies are recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and/or the U.S. Department of Education.
- Institutional accreditation may be either regional, or less commonly, national. If an institution holds national accreditation, students should investigate by whom their degrees, or any credits they earn, will be recognized, as recognition can vary considerably.
- Programmatic accrediting bodies are either recognized by CHEA or are members of the Association of Specialized and Programmatic Accreditors (ASPA). Programmatic accreditation of a degree program, department, or school may be a requirement for practicing in certain professions (examples: medicine, dentistry and engineering)

Special Note Regarding Institutions NOT Holding Recognized Accreditation

Because accreditation is voluntary in the United States, an institution can choose whether it wishes to be regionally or nationally accredited, or even if it wishes to be accredited at all. Or an institution may be accredited by a body that is not recognized. Students at institutions that do not hold some form of recognized regional or national accreditation are likely to encounter difficulties in the following areas:

- They will be ineligible for many loans and scholarships, as well as some other academic honors. For example, many foreign governments will grant educational loans only to students who are attending a regionally accredited institution.
- It will be difficult to transfer credits to, or to have degrees recognized by, other U.S. institutions that do hold recognized regional or national accreditation.
- Governments of other countries will often not accept degrees from, or recognize, U.S. institutions that do not hold regional or national accreditation.
- Many private employers will not recognize credits and degrees earned at an institution that is not regionally accredited.

In considering institutions that do not hold accreditation from a recognized body, you need to be aware of two additional factors:

- Recognized accrediting bodies have strict policies to avoid any conflict of interest between the institution being evaluated and those who are doing the evaluating. For example, evaluators cannot be students, alumni, owners, or employees of the institution undergoing the evaluation. This integrity in the accrediting process cannot be guaranteed if the accrediting body is not recognized.
- If you attend an institution that does not hold accreditation from a recognized accrediting body, not only may employers and governments not accept your credits and degree, but also the education that you receive may not be as current or comprehensive or of as high a standard as that offered by institutions accredited by recognized bodies.

Useful Web Sites

Association of Specialized and Programmatic Accreditors (ASPA)

<http://www.aspa-usa.org>

Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)

<http://www.chea.org>

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education

<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/>

Commission on English Language Program Accreditation

<http://www.cea-accredit.org/>

Regional Accrediting Bodies:

Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools — Commission on Higher Education (MSA/CHE)

<http://www.msache.org>

New England Association of Schools and Colleges — Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (NEASC-CIHE)

<http://www.neasc.org/cihe/cihe.htm>

North Central Association of Colleges and Schools — The Higher Learning Commission

<http://www.ncacihe.org/>

Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges — Commission on Colleges and Universities

<http://www.cocnasc.org>

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) — Commission on Colleges

<http://www.sacscoc.org>

Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) — The Senior College Commission

<http://www.wascweb.org/>

Selected Programmatic Accrediting Bodies

Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology, Inc. (ABET) — Accreditor for programs in applied science, computing, engineering, and technology

www.abet.org

Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) — Accreditor for professional degree programs in pharmacy leading to the Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD)

<http://www.acpe-accredit.org>

Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International (AACSB) — Accreditor for degree programs in business administration and accounting

www.aacsb.edu

Association of American Medical Colleges, Liaison Committee on Medical Education (AAMC/LCME) — Accreditor for medical schools

www.aamc.org, www.lcme.org